Populace and populism: a correlational class analysis of populist beliefs in the general public

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Abstract

Populism is generally defined (1) as the combination of people-centrism with political cynicism, (2) as anti-elitist and anti-pluralist, and (3) as ideologically 'thin'. This definition largely borrows from populism supply research which focus on populist politicians, parties, and movements. However, little research has investigated if this supply-definition of populism as a consistent set of ideas holds up in the general public (i.e., the demand side of politics). In this paper, we conduct an individual-level analysis of populist beliefs using data from Flanders (N = 1449) by analyzing how common people interrelate four political attitudes: people-centrism, political cynicism, elitism, and pluralism. Correlational class analysis is used to separate the sample into different clusters with different ways of interrelating the four political attitudes. These clusters are compared in terms of their left- or right-wing ideological profile and socio-political background (i.e., populist voting, education, political interest, income levels, economic pessimism, and age). Results show that we find four distinct clusters: pluralist populists, anti-pluralist populists, ambiguous beliefs, and disordered beliefs. Further analyses show that higher levels of populist attitudes are related to more right-wing ideological attitudes in each cluster and that higher educated and more politically interested respondents belong to the anti-pluralist populist cluster which is in line with the supply-definition of populism.

Keywords: populism, correlational class analysis, belief systems, right-wing populism, political attitudes, elitism, pluralism, public opinion, populist radical right, Western Europe

I. Introduction

Since the 1980's, the electoral success of right-wing populism has grown in countries like Austria (FPÖ), France (FN), the Netherlands (LPF & PVV), Belgium (VB), Switzerland (SVP), Italy (FI & MSS), Denmark (DF), and the U.S.A. (Trump). This success has spurred extensive research that aims to identify what exactly makes political parties populist. Although the definition of populism is approached in different ways (e.g., as discourse, as ideology, as style, as organization) (Canovan, 1999; Weyland, 2001; Mudde, 2004; Rooduijn, 2013; Moffit and Tormey, 2014; Schoor, 2017; De Vreese, Esser, Aalberg, Reinemann, and Stanyer, 2018), most scholars agree on three defining features.

First, populism consists of a set of beliefs that separate society into 'the people' and the political 'elite' (Mudde, 2004; Deiwiks, 2009; Rooduijn, 2013; Van Kessel, 2014). The elite are depicted as morally corrupt, self-serving, and the cause of social suffering because they have no interest in serving the people. Second, populist beliefs are in contrast with certain representative democratic beliefs such as elitism (i.e., experts are more politically competent than laymen) and pluralism (i.e., decisions are negotiated between multiple interest groups and with minorities) because these beliefs are perceived to stop politicians from acting in accordance with the will of the people (Urbinati, 1998; Mudde, 2004; Plattner, 2010; Schulz, Müller, Schemer, Wirz, Wettstein, and Wirth, 2017). Third, populist beliefs are ideologically 'thin' (Freeden, 1998) as they do not provide answers to most cultural or economic problems (e.g., migration, income inequality, climate change, etc.). To provide such answers, populist beliefs are often attached to a host ideology (e.g., socialism or nativism) which produces a particular subtype of populism (e.g., egalitarian or ethnocentric populism) that matches the local socio-political context (Taggart, 2004; Mudde, 2007; Deiwiks, 2009; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013; Rooduijn and Akkerman, 2017).

This definition of populism as a specific set of beliefs is mostly inspired by populism supply research which is one of two dominant streams of populism research (Hawkins and Kaltwasser, 2017; Mudde,

2017; Kaltwasser, 2018). Populism supply research aims to distinguish populist parties from non-populist parties by analyzing the prevalence of populist beliefs in speeches, party manifesto's, and parliamentary voting (Pauwels, 2011; Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Otjes and Louwerse, 2015; Rooduijn et al., 2017; Schoor, 2017). Alternatively, populism demand research – the focus of this paper – aims to analyze the prevalence, antecedents, and effects of populist beliefs in the general public (Akkerman, Mudde, and Zaslove, 2014; Rooduijn, 2014; Elchardus and Spruyt, 2016; Spruyt, Keppens, and Van Droogenbroeck, 2016; Akkerman, Zaslove, and Spruyt, 2017; Schultz et al., 2017; Rooduijn, 2018).

However, current demand research shows several shortcomings. Generally, populism demand research is relatively scarce because populism mostly draws attention to the political parties that use populism instead of the general public who supports populism. So, few studies have examined if the supply-definition of populism matches the way populism presents itself in the general public. Further, research that does focus on the general public often approaches populism by comparing voters of populist parties to voters of traditional parties (Akkerman et al., 2014; Rooduijn, 2014; Akkerman et al., 2017; Rooduijn, 2018), which limits the study of populism to those instances when populist beliefs lead to populist voting. Lastly, although populism is defined as a set of beliefs, demand studies often use either a single attitude or a few proxy measures of populism (Elchardus et al., 2016; Spruyt et al., 2016). Because of these shortcomings, as Mudde (2007, p. 222) and Rooduijn (2014, p. 81) remark, it remains largely unknown if the different beliefs that make up populism at the political level also form a coherent set of beliefs in the general public.

In this paper, we conduct an individual-level analysis of populism in the general public by analyzing how people themselves combine several political beliefs (i.e., people-centrism, political cynicism, elitism, and pluralism) into their personal political view. For this purpose, we employ a statistical method that allows us to partition people into groups based on how they organize their political beliefs – for example, how a person's attitudes towards the political elite are positively or negatively related to his/her attitudes towards non-political elite such as intellectuals or entrepreneurs. This approach is

based on Converse's (1964) concept of belief systems which refer to different configurations of political beliefs. Although people can construct unique belief systems, Converse stresses that society tends to have a limited number of general belief systems that are held by different groups of people. By approaching populism as a type of belief system, we aim to probe the way populism manifests itself at the public level without making a priori assumptions about the dimensionality, prevalence, or subtypes of populism.

This paper contributes to discussions about the definition of populism between supply and demand research. While supply research defines populism as a specific set of political beliefs that is adopted by political parties to different degrees (e.g., empty populism, anti-elitist populism, excluding populism, complete populism) (Jagers et al., 2007) and as different subtypes (e.g., socialist-, nativist-, neo-liberal populism) (Mudde, 2007; Pauwels, 2011; Mudde et al., 2013); demand research often defines populism as an attitude without further attention to the complexity, type, or degree of populism. We believe this is counterproductive given that both research streams assume that political parties use populism to attract populist people which also presumes that the type of populism on the supply side matches the type of populism on the demand side. By examining what degree or types of populism are present in the general public, this study aims to stimulate further integration of supply with demand research.

II. The supply-definition of populism

Populism is difficult to define because it manifests itself in different shapes and forms. First, different types of populism appear at different places. For example, Europe is familiar with a right-wing nativist populism that emphasizes the threat of migration to the traditions and welfare of native citizens; while South America is familiar with a left-wing socialist populism that emphasizes the threat of multinationals and capitalists to the lower and middle classes (Mudde et al., 2013; Panizza, 2013; Rooduijn, 2013). Second, populism refers to both a strategy of political parties and a political attitude of the general public. Because party-approaches to populism often emphasize characteristics that cannot be seen as defining traits of populism at the public level (e.g., charismatic leadership, party organization, simplistic

rhetoric) (Canovan, 1999; Weyland, 2001; Deiwiks, 2009; Moffit et al., 2014), the definition of populism often includes or excludes different beliefs or characteristics depending on the research subject (Van Kessel, 2014).

Because populism manifests itself so differently, scholars have called for a minimal approach to the definition of populism by focusing on the features that all (or most) populist parties or politicians have in common (Mudde, 2007; Rooduijn, 2013). Most scholars settle for three features: (1) populism consists of people-centrist and political cynical beliefs, (2) populism is anti-elitist and anti-pluralist, and (3) populism is often associated with other ideologies (e.g., nativist or socialism) but is not defined by these ideologies.

II.1 Core populist beliefs: people-centrism and political cynicism

So, populism can be defined as a set of beliefs that emphasize the struggle of 'the common people' against 'the political elite'. These beliefs reiterate the vertical distinction between the people at the bottom and politicians at the top. This distinction is also made normative as the people are depicted as hard working, upright citizens who suffer at the hands of corrupt and self-serving politicians (Mudde, 2004). Populists argue that politicians are unresponsive to people's needs because their attention is drawn towards special interests (e.g., corporations or lobbies) and self-interests (e.g., personal wealth or power). Because politicians do not serve the people, populists argue that the people should collectively oppose the political establishment to reinstall 'the will of the people' (or 'common sense') as the legitimate basis for democracy (Mudde, 2004; Mudde et al., 2013).

Populism also emphasizes that 'the common people' and the 'political elite' are homogenous categories (Taggart, 2004; Rooduijn, 2013; Van Kessel, 2014). Although 'the people' includes individuals with different educations, occupations, ages, and sexes, populists see such differences as irrelevant because all common people share oppression and neglect by politicians. In the same sense, politicians are seen as homogenously corrupt and deplorable which allows populists to categorically blame politicians for people's different grievances.

So, by emphasizing the homogeneity of – and the conflict between – the people and politicians, populism dichotomizes political thinking into two simplistic beliefs: (1) the belief that 'the common people' are homogeneously good with a unified will that is the sole legitimate basis for democracy (i.e., people-centrism) and (2) the belief that politicians are homogenously bad with a unified will to deceive people and pursue their own interests (i.e., political cynicism[1]) (Krouwel and Abts, 2007; Rooduijn, 2013; Rooduijn et al., 2017).

II.2 The populist criticism of liberal representative democracy

As Urbinati (1998) remarks, "the debate over the meaning of populism turns out to be a debate over the interpretation of democracy" (p. 116). Indeed, populism offers a set of beliefs that interpret democracy as 'direct majoritarianism' which stand in contrast to two beliefs on which liberal representative democracy is based: pluralism and elitism.

First, pluralism is the belief that society consists of many different groups each with their own interests. Given this plurality of interests, politicians should search for compromises between various interests (Plattner, 2010). So, contrary to populism, pluralism stresses the heterogeneity of the people without establishing normative oppositions between specific groups. Instead of majoritarianism, pluralism stresses the protection of minorities through extensive rights and institutions (Urbinati, 1998). So, while pluralism favors open discussion and institutional checks and balances to ensure that political decisions do not excessively disadvantage minorities, populism argues that liberal checks and balances unjustifiably constrain the direct influence of the democratic majority.

Second, elitism is the belief that educated experts are better suited to make political decisions than common people who are uninformed and unexperienced. Instead of direct majoritarianism, elitism

[1] In this paper, we use political cynicism to denote negative attitudes towards politicians while we use anti-elitism to denote negative attitudes towards non-political elites (e.g., intellectuals, experts, etc.). We believe it is important to separate these beliefs given that not all types of populism are unequivocally negative towards specific non-political elites.

stresses the importance of experts who mediate popular will into effective policies. Similar to populism, elitism established a normative distinction between 'the people' and 'the elite', but – contrary to populism – the elites are depicted as competent and regular people as incompetent (Mudde, 2004; Schoor, 2017). So, while elitism argues that experts (e.g., intellectuals, entrepreneurs, etc.) are well-equipped to advice on how to act in the best interest of society; populism argues that the people themselves know what is in the best interest of society.

Thus Canovan (1999) aptly claims that populism reaffirms democracy's promise of power to the people while, at the same time, attacking the way democracy is pragmatically build up on institutions, laws, and experts which limit the direct input of the people. By criticizing liberal representative democracy, populism makes clear what it stands for (i.e., people-centrism and political cynicism) and does not stand for (i.e., pluralism and elitism) (Mudde, 2004; Schulz et al., 2017).

II.3 Populism as 'thin-ideological'

As previously mentioned, populism appears in different places as specific subtypes which are both similar and different. For instance, left- and right-wing populism share their people-centrism and anti-elitism, but differ in whom they label as 'the people' and 'the elite'. Left-wing populism defines 'the people' as the lower classes who are exploited by corporate greed; while right-wing populism defines 'the people' as the local community that is losing its cultural heritage due to an influx of migrants/refugees (Mudde et al., 2013; Panizza, 2013; Otjes and Louwerse, 2015; Akkerman et al., 2017).

Because these subtypes share their populist views but differ in their left or right ideological approach, populism is often defined as a thin-centered ideology (Mudde, 2004; Pauwels, 2011; Akkerman et al., 2014; Akkerman et al., 2017). As Freeden (1998) argues, thin-centered ideologies have a limited set of unique views that are insufficient to answer every political question. To overcome this ideological thinness, thin-centered ideologies are attached to a host ideology which covers a broader range of political issues. When applied to populism, the idea of a thin-centered ideology allows us to separate left- and right-wing populism into its shared populist beliefs and its peripheral host beliefs.

At its core, populism refers to the belief in a social conflict between the people and the elite. However, 'the people' and 'the elite' are empty categories that may be used to indicate different groups of people (Laclau, 2007). 'The people' and 'the elite' are given meaning by connecting them to a host ideology that establishes a specific social crisis (Taggart, 2004; Moffit et al., 2013; Otjes et al., 2015; Rooduijn et al., 2017). For example, left-wing populism uses socialism to define 'the people' as the poor based on the perception of economic crises caused by capitalists; while right-wing populism uses nativism to define 'the people' as an ethnic community based on the perception of cultural crises caused by immigrants, activists, and intellectuals. In other words, populist ideas become meaningful once they are embedded into a broader political worldview that places the populist criticism of the political establishment at the center of what is going wrong in society.

Since populism is attached to a range of host ideologies (e.g., socialism, neo-liberalism, nativism) (Mudde, 2007), populism should be defined by its core beliefs (i.e., people-centrism, political cynicism, anti-elitism, and anti-pluralism) instead of its peripheral host beliefs (e.g., ethnocentrism, authoritarianism, welfare chauvinism).

III The demand-approach: populism as a belief system

Generally speaking, populism on the supply side of politics is defined as the combination of people-centrist, political cynical, anti-elitist, and anti-pluralist beliefs (Mudde, 2004; Akkerman et al., 2014; Van Kessel, 2014; Schulz et al., 2017). Although defined as a set of four beliefs, not every populist party fully adopts all four beliefs. For example, some left-wing populist parties are rather pluralist because they tend to embrace the people's social and cultural diversity; while some right-wing populist parties are not as clearly opposed to certain non-political elite (e.g., businessmen, experts, etc.) (Otjes et al., 2015; Mudde et al., 2013; Panizza, 2013). So, because some parties only partially adopt populism, previous studies try to capture such instances with concepts like 'empty populism' (i.e., people-centrism), 'anti-political elite populism' (i.e., people-centrism combined with political cynicism), and 'complete

populism' (i.e., the combination of people-centrism, political cynicism, anti-elitism, and anti-pluralism) (Jagers et al., 2007; Hameleers et al., 2018).

Although political parties are known to sometimes partially adopt populism, little is known about how (or if) the general public also adopts populist beliefs to different extents. This is problematic because research further assumes that populism is used by politicians and parties to attract populist voters. If the extent to which the public is populist explains populist voting, then more attention should be given to how consistently or inconsistently the public supports populist beliefs. In other words, the question is if the general public on the demand side of politics combines the same four beliefs into populism as predicted by the supply-definition of populism. We approach this question through the notion of belief systems.

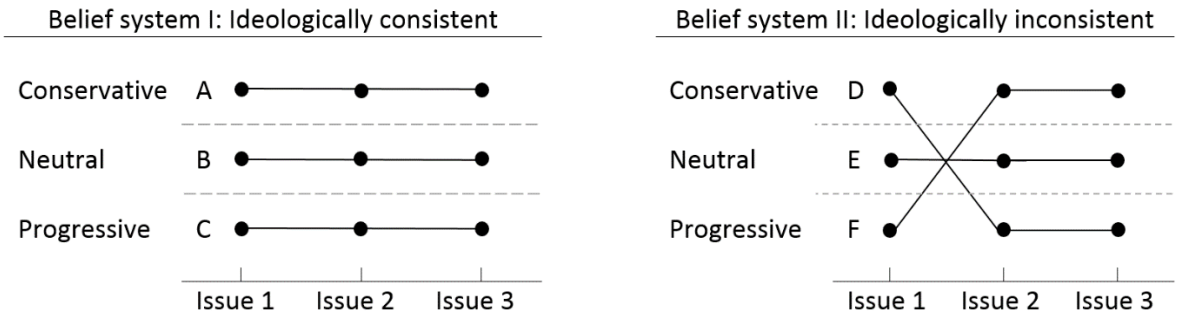
III.1 What are belief systems

Converse (1964) uses belief systems to refer to a systematic way of organizing one's political beliefs into a coherent and logical understanding of politics. As an illustration, Converse compares political conservatives to progressives. Although conservatives and progressives disagree on what they believe, Converse argues that both groups do agree on how political beliefs are interconnected – that is, both expect that people who are conservative (or progressive) on economic issues will also be conservative (or progressive) on other issues. In that sense, conservatives and progressives act as polar opposites of a single belief system which connects political beliefs in a systematic way. So, the notion of belief systems asserts that people's political beliefs are rarely independent of each other, but are clustered into coherent mental systems that make sense of politics.

However, Converse further argues that the general public possesses several belief systems that differ from the political ideologies that govern the political field. Namely, common people are less worried than political experts (e.g., politicians) about being ideologically consistent (e.g., conservative or progressive) towards every political issue. Instead, people with different social identities or obligations may have beliefs that seem ideologically contradictory (Converse, 1964). When looking at the general

public, Converse expects to see a range of belief systems with different ways of interrelating political beliefs into configurations that are more or less in line with political ideologies (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Two hypothetical belief systems[2]



III.2 Investigating populist belief systems

We argue that populism can be approached as a belief system for two reasons. First, previous studies argue that the uniqueness of populism is not situated in a single belief, but in the way populism combines several beliefs (Mudde, 2004; Mudde et al., 2013; Rooduijn, 2013; Rooduijn, 2014; Van Kessel, 2014). Because the notion of belief systems focus on how people combine political beliefs into coherent systems, we argue that this places the unique quality of populism at the center of analysis. Second**,** approaching populism as a belief system allows us to examine what (sub)types or degrees of populism are present in the general public and to compare these to the supply-definition of populism as the consistent combination of people centrism, political cynicism, anti-elitism, and anti-pluralism. In this way, we are able to assess the conceptual distance between populism at the demand level and populism at the supply level of politics.

Based on the supply-definition, populism on the demand side can be expected to present itself as a consistently populist belief system in which (1) people-centrism and political cynicism are strongly interrelated – forming the core attitudes of populism – and (2) people-centrism and political cynicism

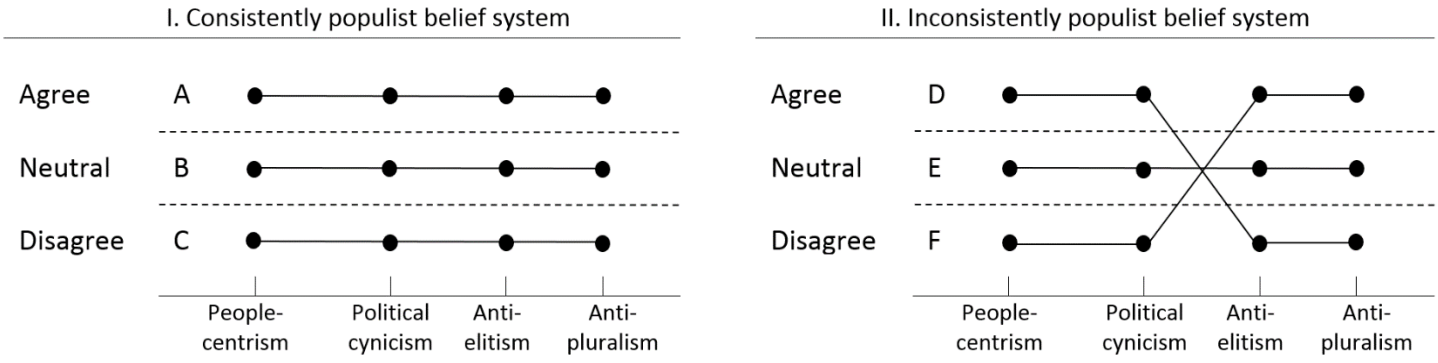
[2] For similar figures see Daenekindt, De Koster, and Van der Waal (2017).

are negatively associated with elitism and pluralism. This belief system would contain two polar opposites: populists and non-populists. Because populists and non-populists are part of the same belief system, they would agree on how beliefs are connected, but they would disagree on what positions they take towards these beliefs – that is, populists would be people-centrist, political cynical, anti-elitist, and anti-pluralist, while non-populists would be anti people-centrist, anti political cynical, elitist, and pluralist.

However, this consistently populist belief system assumes that the general public is equally concerned with consistency as many political parties are on the supply side of politics. If people are less concerned with ideological consistency, as Converse (1964) argues, then we expect to see a range of different ways of how populist beliefs are combined with non-populist beliefs into a limited number of inconsistently populist belief systems (see figure 2).

H1. Instead of a single populist belief system, the general public contains a number of belief systems that differ in their associations between people-centrism, political cynicism, elitism, and pluralism.

Figure 2. Two hypothetical populist belief systems



If we expect to find different populist belief systems in the general public, what could explain this heterogeneity? We explore two possibilities: (1) people have different left or right ideological beliefs that constrain their positions on populist beliefs and/or (2) people have different social backgrounds.

As previously discussed, populism does not offer a full answer to society's problems and is often combined with other (host) ideologies. When certain populist beliefs conflict with people's other ideological beliefs, we expect that people could drop the incompatible populist beliefs in favor of their other left or right ideological beliefs. For example, a socialist might feel conflicted about adopting anti-pluralist positions while a nativist does not; while both socialists and nativists could easily adopt political cynical positions. So, the degree to which people adopt populist beliefs could be affected by people's other ideological beliefs.

H2. The differences between belief systems are related to differences in left or right ideological attitudes.

People's social characteristics could also explain differences between belief systems. As Converse (1964) notes, people tend to have more consistent political views when they have a good understanding of politics. So, differences in political interest or education could be a first reason for why people have different belief systems. A second reason could be found in people's sense of social crisis. The idea of social crisis is an integral part of populism (Taggart, 2004; Rooduijn, 2013) which attributes blame for society's problems to politicians, non-political elite, and out-groups (Hameleers, Bos, de Vreese, 2016; Hameleers and Schmuck, 2017). Therefore, the stronger people believe that society is indeed collapsing into crisis, the more likely it could be that people will consistently adopt populist views towards politicians, non-political elites, and out-groups/minorities.

H3. The differences between belief systems are related to differences in perceived social crisis, political interest, and education.

Lastly, we ask what difference it makes if people have different populist belief systems. More specifically, we are interested in the differences between belief systems in voting for populist parties. Because we expect that some belief systems will be more consistently populist than others, we also expect that populist voters will tend to have a more consistently populist belief system compared to non-populist voters.

H4. Populist voters are more likely to have a consistently populist belief system compared non-populist voters.

IV Data and methods

We use data from Flanders (the Dutch speaking part of Belgium) that was commissioned by the Flemish government and collected by randomly selecting Dutch-speaking residents from Flanders and Brussels who are aged 18 and older. The data was collected in 2016 using computer-assisted personal interviews. The survey attained a response rate of 57.20% which produced a sample of 1449 respondents.

IV.1 Analytical strategy

In line with others (Daenekindt et al., 2017; Baldassarri and Goldberg, 2014; Dimaggio and Goldberg, 2018), we use several analytical steps to empirically uncover and describe belief systems in the general public.

First, we use correlational class analysis (CCA) to reveal underlying populist belief systems in our sample. CCA (Goldberg, 2011; Boutyline, 2017) is a recently developed technique that allows researchers to partition a sample into different clusters based on the way respondents interrelate different variables. By using CCA on a set of items that measure populist and non-populist attitudes, the analysis will reveal any number of clusters that have distinctive ways of correlating these items. In other words, CCA reveals different clusters of people with maximally different correlation matrices that optimally capture real differences in how respondents answered the items. Because CCA currently cannot handle missing information, we deleted the respondents with missing values on our core items (i.e., people-centrism, political cynicism, elitism, and pluralism) which reduces our sample to 1342.

Second, we look at the differences within each cluster. We use confirmatory factor analysis to investigate how populist beliefs within each cluster are associated with people's left or right ideological attitudes (i.e., ethnocentrism, gender traditionalism, ecological attitudes). This allows us to describe the type of populism in each cluster. Confirmatory factor analysis expresses correlation matrices in linear

terms in order to specify and test measurement models and relations between latent factors (Brown, 2006). Because CCA produces clusters with different underlying correlation matrices, we believe confirmatory factor analysis is a suitable method to describe and summarize these correlation matrices.

Third, we look at the differences between clusters with multinomial logistic regressions. More specifically, we investigate if socio-political characteristics (i.e., sense of crisis, political interest, voting choices) and socio-demographic differences (i.e., age, education, and income) explain the observed differences between clusters.

IV.2 Measures

Populist attitudes. The correlational class analysis is run on four sets of items that measure four distinct political attitudes. All items are measured using five-point Likert scales, ranging from 'fully disagree' to 'fully agree' (for more information on these items see Akkerman et al., 2014).

People-centrism was measured using 4 items: "Politicians need to exclusively follow the will of the people", "The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions", "The political differences between the elite and the people are larger than the differences among the people", and "I would rather be represented by a citizen than by a specialized politician".

Political cynicism was measured using 3 items: "Elected politicians talk too much and take too little action", "What people call 'compromise' in politics is really just selling out one's principles", and "Common people have often been deceived by politicians".

Elitism was measured using 3 items: "Our country would be governed better if important decisions were left up to successful business people", "Our country would be governed better if important decisions were left up to independents experts", and "Our society is so complex that important decisions should be made by non-political professionals".

Pluralism was measured using 4 items: “In a democracy it is important to make compromises among differing viewpoints”, “It is important to listen to the opinion of other groups”, “Freedom depends on how diversity is accepted”, and “No opinion is incontestable. That is why it is good to consider different opinions”.

Ideological attitudes. We use three sets of items to measure people’s ideological orientation, using 5-point Likert items.

Ethnocentrism refers to people’s negative attitudes towards immigrants and was measured using four items: “In general, immigrants cannot be trusted”, “Immigrants exploit our social security system”, “The presence of different cultures enriches our society”[3], and “Immigrants threaten our culture and traditions”.

Gender traditionalism refers to people’s attitudes towards traditional gender roles and was measured using 8 items: “Ironing clothes is a task for both men and women”[3], “Women are more suited to raise children than men”, “Getting a good education is less important for girls than boys”, “Washing the dishes is a task for both men and women”[3], “Boys can be raised with more freedom than girls”, “It is unnatural if a woman supervises men at the workplace”, “Men are more suited to replace a flat tire than women”, and “Men and women are equally suited to raise children”[3].

Ecological attitudes refer to people’s attitude towards social attention to ecological problems and was measured using 5 items: “Most ecological problems in Flanders are exaggerated” [3], “I rarely worry about pollution in Flanders” [3], “Talking about pollution in Flanders makes people more worried than necessary” [3], “Nowadays, we worry too much about the environment and not enough about prices and jobs” [3], and “People worry too much about the damage that economic progress does to the environment” [3].

[3] Was reverse coded.

Socio-political variables. We use three socio-political characteristics.

Party voting was measured by the following question: "If elections would be held next Sunday, for which political party would you vote?". Answers were coded into two categories: populist radical right voters (8.7%) and other voters (i.e., other parties and independents) (91.3%).

Political interest was measured in two ways. First, respondents were asked to indicate how interested they are in politics on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 'totally not interested' to 'very interested'. Second, respondents answered 4 items using 5-point Likert scales ranging from 'fully disagree' to 'fully agree'. The statements were: "I know more about politics than most people I know", "I usually have an opinion when people talk about politics", "I don't understand most political topics"[3], "Sometimes politics seem so complex that people like me don't understand what's going on"[3]. We combined these items into a mean-scale with higher scores indicating more political interest (M=1.97; SD= 0.89; Range= 0-4; Cronbach's α = 0.851).

Economic pessimism captures people's level of pessimism about the state of economic wellbeing and inequality in the near future. We use economic pessimism as a measure of people's perception of a developing social-economic crisis. Five items are used: "In 10 years there will be more unemployed in Flanders", "In 10 years people will have to take care of their own pensions", "In 10 years the number of socially excluded people will have increased", "In 10 years the next generation will have a lower income", "In 10 years the gap between the highest and the lowest incomes will be larger". We combined these items into a mean-scale with higher scores indicating more pessimism (M= 2.61; SD= 0.54; Range=0.8-4; Cronbach's α = 0.685).

Socio-demographics. We include *age* (in years), *education* (as 'no and lower education', 'secondary education', and 'higher education'), and people's self-reported comfort with their current *income* (as 'can afford a comfortable lifestyle', 'income is enough to manage', and 'income is insufficient').

V. Results

V.1 Four populist belief systems

The CCA was performed[4] on 14 items that measure people-centrism, political cynicism, elitism, and pluralism. The analysis found four distinct clusters, representing 41.43%, 19.32%, 22.48%, and 16.77% of the sample. Each cluster represents a distinct way of interrelating attitudes into a belief system. We visualize each cluster as a network to facilitate a straightforward interpretation of the differences between clusters (see figure 3). In each network, nodes embody items while edges represent correlations. The width and shape of the edges depend on the strength and direction of the correlations: wider (narrower) edges represent stronger (weaker) correlations while dashed (full) edges show negative (positive) correlations (see appendix for full correlation matrices). Only significant correlations are shown ($p \leq 0.05$).

The networks show several differences between clusters. We discuss the important differences by looking at three traits: (1) the strength of association between people-centrism and political cynicism, (2) the association of pluralism to people-centrism and political cynicism, and (3) the association of elitism to people-centrism and political cynicism.

First, the clusters differ in how strongly people-centrism and political cynicism are interrelated. While both attitudes are strongly interrelated in cluster 1 and 2 as shown by the high correlations between the items, people-centrism and political cynicism are fairly disconnected in cluster 3 and 4 into separate constructs as shown by the lower correlations. In other words, the results show clear evidence of a latent populist construct that constrains people's people-centrist and political cynical attitudes in cluster 1 and 2 while these attitudes are less constrained in cluster 3 and 4.

[4] Using the 'corclass' (Boutyline, 2016) and 'qgraph' (Epskamp, Cramer, Waldorp, Schmittermann, and Borsboom, 2012) packages in R.

Second, contrary to the supply-definition of populism, most clusters do not show negative associations of pluralism to people-centrism and political cynicism. Instead, cluster 3 and 4 show rather weak or conflicting (i.e., both positive and negative) associations. Especially in cluster 3, pluralism is largely disassociated from other attitudes. In contrast, pluralism is strongly associated to other attitudes in cluster 1 and 2. More specifically, cluster 1 shows positive associations of pluralism to people-centrism and political cynicism, while cluster 2 shows negative associations. In other words, only cluster 2 shows the expected negative relationship of pluralism to people-centrism and political cynicism.

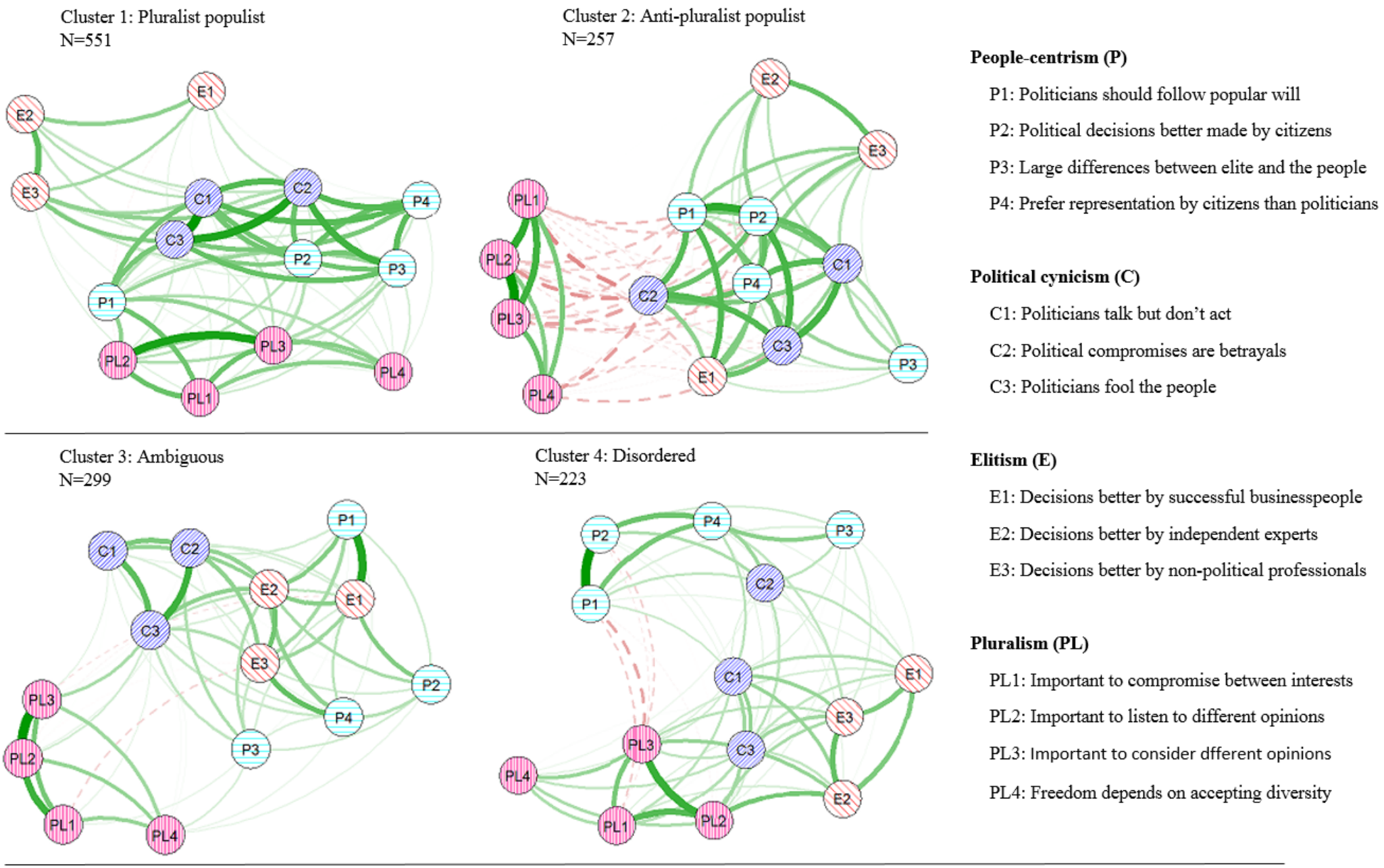
Third, also contrary to the supply-definition of populism, none of the clusters display the expected negative association of elitism to people-centrism and political cynicism. Instead, all correlations are positive which shows that respondents with a more negative attitude towards politicians tend to be more positive towards non-political elite. So, because people's elitism does not differentiate between clusters, elitism does not give us further insight into different (sub)types of populism in our sample. Instead, all four clusters show that, generally speaking, higher levels of people-centrism and/or political cynicism are associated with more positive attitudes towards businesspeople, experts, and non-political professionals.

Based on these considerations, we label cluster 1 as a *pluralist populist* belief system and cluster 2 as an *anti-pluralist populist* belief system because both clusters have a strong integration of core populist attitudes (i.e., people-centrism and political cynicism) but show a different association between these core populist attitudes and pluralist attitudes. Again, we do not claim that every person in cluster 1 and 2 is populist, but that the people within each cluster agree on how populist attitudes are related to pluralist attitudes. While cluster 1 and 2 show that people with a strong integration of populist attitudes also have a clear position towards pluralism, cluster 3 shows that people with a low integration of populist attitudes are uncertain about their position towards pluralism. In that sense, cluster 3 can be termed as an *ambiguous* belief system because people in cluster 3 are more likely to combine populist attitudes with non-populist attitudes without a clear association of these populist and non-

populist attitudes to pluralist attitudes. Lastly, people-centrist and political cynical attitudes are less integrated in cluster 4 and are inconsistently associated with elitism and pluralism – that is, pluralist attitudes are slightly negatively associated with people-centrist attitudes and positively associated with political cynical attitudes, while elitist attitudes are positively associated with political cynical attitudes but not associated with people-centrist attitudes. Because there is no obvious logic or order that governs these relations, we term it as an *disordered* belief system.

Thus, as expected (H1), the analysis uncovers several distinct belief systems with different ways of interrelating people-centrist, political cynical, elitist, and pluralist items. Although, none of the four belief systems fully matches the supply-definition of populism, the anti-pluralist populist cluster (cluster 2) comes close as it contains (1) a strong relation between people-centrism and political cynicism and (2) a negative association of pluralism to people-centrism and political cynicism. In that sense, we label the anti-pluralist populist cluster as a more consistently populist cluster (i.e., more in line with the ideological consistency of populism as emphasized in supply research) while we label the pluralist populist, ambiguous, and disordered clusters as less consistently populist clusters. Next, we assess whether the observed differences between clusters also point towards differences in left- or right-wing ideological attitudes.

Figure 3. Visualization of different populist belief systems as correlation networks



Note. Nodes represent items. Full edges represent positive correlations; dashed edges represent negative correlations.

V.2 Belief systems and 'host' ideological attitudes

We use confirmatory factor analysis to investigate if higher levels of populist attitudes within each cluster are related to higher levels of left- or right-wing ideological attitudes. In this way, we examine if each cluster incorporates a different subtype of populism or if all clusters are variants of either left- or right-wing populism. In order to simplify the analysis, we limit each cluster to its core populist attitudes (i.e., people-centrism and political cynicism) which we relate to three ideological attitudes: ethnocentrism, gender traditionalism, and ecological attitudes (see appendix for structural model).

Contrary to expectations (H2), our results show that the observed differences between clusters are not embedded in broader ideological differences. Instead of containing a specific subtype of populism, each cluster contains a variant of right-wing populism (see table 1). In each cluster, we observe that higher levels of people-centrism or political cynicism are related to more ethnocentrism, more gender traditionalism, and less positive ecological attitudes. Although we see some differences between clusters in magnitude and significance of the estimated correlations, we find no evidence that some clusters have a different ideological profile than others (see appendix for item loadings).

In line with the CCA network visualizations, the results also show a higher association between people-centrism and political cynicism in the pluralist populist and anti-pluralist populist belief systems compared to the ambiguous and disordered belief systems. The highest correlation between people-centrism and political cynicism as latent attitudes is found in the pluralist populist cluster ($r = 0.937$), followed by the anti-pluralist populist cluster ($r = 0.930$), the ambiguous cluster ($r = 0.576$), and the disordered cluster ($r = 0.559$). This again confirms that one important difference between clusters is the level of constraint between people-centrism and political cynicism. In the pluralist populist and anti-pluralist populist belief systems, respondent's level of people-centrism is very informative about their level of political cynicism; while these attitudes are less connected in the ambiguous and disordered belief systems.

Table 1. Measurement model estimates: correlations between latent factors

	Belief systems							
	(1) Pluralist populist		(2) Anti-pluralist populist		(3) Ambiguous		(4) Disordered	
	P	C	P	C	P	C	P	C
Ethnocentrism	0.329 ***	0.467 ***	0.425 ***	0.541 ***	0.346 ***	0.351 ***	0.355 ***	0.439 ***
Gender traditionalism	0.083	0.169 **	0.221 **	0.209 **	0.219 *	0.085	0.203 **	0.167
Ecological attitudes	-0.387 ***	-0.331 ***	-0.313 ***	-0.389 ***	-0.272 **	-0.303 ***	-0.104	-0.260 **
Correlation (P,C)	0.937		0.930		0.576		0.559	
N	543		252		298		220	

P = People-centrism; C = Political cynicism
Item loadings are presented in appendix
* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001

V.3 Social differences between belief systems

Lastly, we inspect the differences in socio-political background between the four clusters. First, we examine the relation between cluster membership and voting for a populist radical right (PRR) party. The cross-tabulation (table 2) shows that PRR voters are more likely to be the pluralist populist cluster and less likely to be in the anti-pluralist populist cluster. This suggests that PRR voters tend see populist attitudes in line with pluralist attitudes.

Second, we analyze the association between cluster membership and several social characteristics. In order to do this, we use multinomial logistic regressions with the four clusters as dependent variable (see table 3). Model 1 only includes the effect of PRR voting, while model 2 includes all socio-political and socio-demographic characteristics.

Model 1 confirms the pattern observed in the cross-tabulation. The odds of belonging to the pluralist populist cluster compared to the anti-pluralist populist cluster are 3.13 ($e^{1.142}$) times higher for PRR voters compared to non-PRR voters. The same conclusion holds for the ambiguous cluster: the odds of belonging to the ambiguous cluster compared to the anti-pluralist populist cluster are 2.17 ($e^{0.774}$) times higher for PRR voters compared to non-PRR voters. In other words, PRR voters are more likely to be pluralist populist or ambiguous than anti-pluralist populist. This is contrary to expectations (H4)

as the result show that PRR voters are more likely to belong the less consistently populist belief systems (i.e., pluralist populists and ambiguous belief systems) than the more consistently populist belief system (i.e., anti-pluralist populists).

Next, the results of model 2 show that the effects of PRR voting disappear once we control for other characteristics. In general, we find significant effects of political interest, economic pessimism, and education. Respondents who are more pessimistic about the future state of the economy are more likely to be pluralist populist (odds ratio = $e^{0.628}$ = 1.874), ambiguous (odds ratio = $e^{0.599}$ = 1.820), and disordered (odds ratio = $e^{0.604}$ = 1.829) compared to anti-pluralist populist. Political interest also differentiates between clusters: respondents who are more interested in politics are less likely to be pluralist populist (odds ratio = $e^{-0.364}$ = 0.695) and ambiguous (odds ratio = $e^{-0.299}$ = 0.742) compared to anti-pluralist populist. Education has a similar effect on cluster membership: those with lower or secondary education are more likely to be pluralist populist (odds ratio = $e^{0.804}$ = 2.235; odds ratio = $e^{0.813}$ = 2.256) and ambiguous (odds ratio = $e^{0.837}$ = 2.309; odds ratio = $e^{0.647}$ = 1.910) compared to anti-pluralist populist. Lastly, we find no effects on cluster membership of age and the self-reported level of comfort with current income levels.

These results partially confirm our expectations (H3). In line with expectations, less educated and politically interested respondents are more likely to belong to more inconsistently populist belief systems (i.e., pluralist populist and ambiguous) than more consistently populist belief systems (i.e., anti-pluralist populist). Contrary to expectations, we do not find that respondents who have a larger sense of social crisis (as measured by economic pessimism) tend to have more consistently populist belief systems. Instead, more pessimist respondents are more likely to be pluralist populist, ambiguous, and disordered than anti-pluralist populist.

Table 2. Cross-tabulation PRR voting with belief systems

	Belief systems			
	(1) Pluralist populist	(2) Anti-pluralist populist	(3) Ambiguous	(4) Disordered
Non-PRR voter	38.7%	20.9%	22.1%	18.3%
PRR voter	58.6%	10.1%	23.2%	8.1%
Total	40.4%	19.9%	22.2%	17.4%

Row percentages. Pearsons X^2 (df = 3): 19.576***

Table 3. Multinomial logistic regression on populist belief systems: logit coefficients

	Model 1			Model 2		
	Pluralist populist (vs. APP)	Ambiguous (vs. APP)	Disordered (vs. APP)	Pluralist populist (vs. APP)	Ambiguous (vs. APP)	Disordered (vs. APP)
Intercept	0.616***	0.058	-0.134	-1.054*	-1.343*	-1.868**
Party voting						
Non-PRR (ref.)	-	-	-	-	-	-
PRR	1.142**	0.774*	-0.090	0.606	0.329	-0.326
Education						
Higher (ref.)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Secundary	-	-	-	0.813***	0.647**	0.212
Lower	-	-	-	0.804*	0.837*	-0.265
Income levels						
Comfortable (ref.)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Enough	-	-	-	0.326	0.090	0.012
Too low	-	-	-	0.103	-0.026	0.021
Social pessimism	-	-	-	0.628***	0.599**	0.604**
Political interest	-	-	-	-0.364**	-0.299*	-0.182
Age	-	-	-	0.006	0.003	0.012

PRR = Populist Radical Right
APP = Anti-pluralist populist
* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001 (n = 1127)

VI. Discussion

In this article, we approach populism as a type of belief system. We explore this idea by applying a new statistical technique which is able to describe the heterogeneity in how individuals combine and organize their political attitudes. Our analysis discovers four distinct belief systems in the populist attitudes of the general public which allows us to make a number of conclusions.

Although populism is often defined as a consistent set of political beliefs, we find that the general public shows more inconsistency in their populist beliefs. On the one hand, people differ in the extent to which they interrelate people-centrism with political cynicism. Two of the belief systems show a moderate association between people-centrism and political cynicism (39.3% of sample), while the other two belief systems show a strong association (60.7% of sample). On the other hand, pluralism clearly differentiates between the four belief systems. For those with a strong association between people-centrism and political cynicism, pluralism is either positively associated with people-centrism and political cynicism (i.e., pluralist populist belief system) or negatively associated with people-cen-

trism and political cynicism (i.e., anti-pluralist populist belief system). For those with a moderate association between people-centrism and political cynicism, pluralism is either not associated with people-centrism and political cynicism (i.e., ambiguous belief system) or inconsistently associated with people-centrism and political cynicism (i.e., disordered belief system). In other words, the more clearly people understand populism as a coherent combination of people-centrism with political cynicism, the more clearly people also understand how populist beliefs relate to pluralist beliefs. So, while pluralism and populism are perceived as contradictory in populism literature (Urbinati, 1998; Mudde, 2004; Plattner, 2010; Mudde et al., 2013; Schulz et al., 2017), we find only limited evidence that populism and pluralism are seen as contradictory beliefs by the general public. Lastly, we find that elitism does not differentiate between the four belief systems. Each belief system shows that people with negative attitudes towards political elite tend to be more positive towards non-political elite and vice versa (for similar results see Akkerman et al., 2014).

The differences between the four belief systems are not related to left- or right-wing ideological attitudes, but are related to social characteristics. More specifically, the results show that higher levels of people-centrism and/or political cynicism are related to more ethnocentrism, more gender traditionalism, and less positive ecological attitudes in each of the four belief systems. So, each belief system displays the ideological profile of (radical) right-wing populism (Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson, 2002; Mudde et al., 2013; Akkerman, 2015; Mudde, 2017; Akkerman et al., 2017; Schulz et al., 2017). However, the belief systems do differ in their average levels of education, political interest, and economic pessimism. Most interestingly, people with a higher education and more interest in politics were more likely to have an anti-pluralist populist belief system compared to a pluralist populist or ambiguous belief system. In line with Converse (1964), this suggests that the supply-definition of populism as a consistently populist system of beliefs mostly holds up for people who are higher educated and interested in politics.

The results further suggest that populist radical right (PRR) voters are most likely to have a pluralist populist belief system. So, in support of previous research (Akkerman et al., 2014; Akkerman et al., 2017), this confirms that people who strongly associate people-centrism with political cynicism are more likely to vote for populist parties. However these pluralist populist PRR voters are also likely to combine populism with ethnocentrism and pluralism. This suggests that pluralism might have a very specific meaning for pluralist populists in which pluralism is perceived as applicable to specific groups and not to other groups (e.g., migrants). However, this question is beyond the scope of this study and should be addressed in future research.

In conclusion, in this article we argue that demand research on populism should focus on individual-level analyses of populist attitudes in the general public in order to bridge the conceptual distance between demand and supply research. We explored one way of how this can be done by focusing on populism as a belief system. Consistent with supply research, we find evidence of different degrees of populism (i.e., less integrated vs. strongly integrated, pluralist populism vs. anti-pluralist populism) (Jagers et al., 2007), a peripheral host ideology (i.e., right-wing nativism) (Mudde, 2007; Pauwels, 2011; Mudde et al., 2013), and a strong integration of people-centrism with political cynicism (Rooduijn, 2013). Contrary to supply research (Urbinati, 1998; Mudde, 2004; Plattner, 2010), we find that populism was positively associated with attitudes towards non-political elite and could be positively, negatively, and not associated with pluralism. Thus, we find that the set of beliefs that is generally defined as populism on the supply side of politics only partially matches the sets of beliefs that make up populism in the general public.

As our study reveals both similarities and differences between how populism is approached in supply research and how populism manifests itself in the general public, future research should consider the following questions.

Previous research stresses that radical right populists often combine anti-migration positions with economic egalitarian positions (De Koster, Achterberg, Van der Waal, 2012; Norocel, 2016). However, our

data does not include economic attitudes such as: economic individualism, egalitarianism, and welfare attitudes. Future research should use both cultural and economic attitudes to further inspect the prevalence of different (ideological) types of populism in the general public.

We interpret the differences between belief systems in education, political interest, and economic pessimism as evidence for Converse's (1964) idea that people with different social positions tend to have different belief systems. However, an alternative explanation could be that certain belief systems contain people that are more populist than those in other belief systems. Because people with higher levels of populist attitudes tend to be less educated, less involved with politics, and more pessimistic (Elchardus et al., 2016; Spruyt et al., 2016), future research should try to control between cluster differences (i.e., associations between attitudes) for within cluster differences (i.e., level of attitudes). However, currently there is no statistical procedure in correlational class analysis that allows this.

Lastly, this paper explores the prevalence of populist belief systems in the context of a single West-European country. Given that the largest differences in populist (sub)types are observed between different socio-political contexts (e.g., South America vs. Europe), future research should aim to apply this individual-level analysis of populist attitudes on cross-national data in order to examine the context dependency of populism in the general public.

Appendix

Table 5. Bivariate correlations between items for people-centrism, political cynicism, elitism, and pluralism for Cluster 1 and Cluster 2

	P1	P2	P3	P4	C1	C2	C3	PL1	PL2	PL3	PL4	E1	E2	E3
P1	1	0,173	0,268	0,131	0,335	0,225	0,331	0,347	0,288	0,281	0,23			0,114
P2	0,53	1	0,366	0,364	0,34	0,352	0,312	0,155	0,211	0,216	0,146	0,146		0,19
P3	0,223	0,283	1	0,381	0,343	0,431	0,362	0,176	0,226	0,215	0,164			0,139
P4	0,344	0,42	0,288	1	0,389	0,394	0,327	0,127	0,091	0,176	0,135	0,115	0,135	0,166
C1	0,383	0,415	0,276	0,442	1	0,399	0,55	0,143	0,112	0,195		0,098	0,213	0,254
C2	0,44	0,4	0,144	0,414	0,36	1	0,495		0,15	0,171	0,133	0,189	0,189	0,285
C3	0,384	0,476	0,234	0,415	0,48	0,452	1	0,145	0,156	0,154	0,131	0,132	0,184	
PL1	-0,227	-0,211		-0,157	-0,134	-0,334	-0,154	1	0,358	0,352	0,297			0,146
PL2	-0,216	-0,182		-0,22	0,133	-0,311	-0,15	0,531	1	0,507	0,274	-0,112		
PL3	-0,217	-0,201		-0,233	-0,162	-0,276		0,494	0,631	1	0,301	-0,085		
PL4	-0,162	-0,208				-0,293	-0,235	0,367	0,343	0,404	1		0,086	0,129
E1	0,455	0,353	0,195	0,343	0,305	0,323	0,392	-0,145	-0,199	-0,138	-0,156	1	0,286	0,245
E2	0,292	0,316		0,18	0,222		0,176						1	0,382
E3	0,312	0,299	0,145	0,327	0,243	0,167	0,178					0,202	0,412	1

Only significant Pearsons correlations are presented ($p \leq 0.05$). Correlations for cluster 1 are presented above the diagonal; correlations for cluster 2 are presented below the diagonal.

Table 6. Bivariate correlations between items for people-centrism, political cynicism, elitism, and pluralism for Cluster 3 and Cluster 4

	P1	P2	P3	P4	C1	C2	C3	PL1	PL2	PL3	PL4	E1	E2	E3
P1	1	0,192	0,118	0,137	0,13	0,182	0,165					0,55	0,337	0,271
P2	0,615	1	0,188	0,237							0,134	0,34	0,263	0,185
P3	0,16	0,181	1	0,161	0,137	0,251	0,212	0,133			0,164	0,17	0,245	0,196
P4	0,367	0,388	0,323	1	0,175	0,13	0,197				0,128	0,23	0,313	0,411
C1	0,191		0,153	0,226	1	0,357	0,422			0,14		0,166	0,306	0,163
C2	0,212	0,251	0,219	0,286	0,156	1	0,491		0,132			0,18	0,309	0,311
C3				0,139	0,305	0,228	1	0,133	0,179	0,26		0,223	0,315	0,246
PL1	-0,194				0,221		0,236	1	0,49	0,369	0,3			-0,173
PL2			0,136		0,276	0,136	0,187	0,438	1	0,619	0,303		-0,116	
PL3	-0,265	-0,182			0,183		0,214	0,362	0,497	1	0,278	-0,148		
PL4					0,155		0,217	0,254	0,257	0,295	1			
E1				0,133	0,24	0,214	0,208		0,136	0,174		1	0,327	0,283
E2				0,136	0,293		0,211	0,175	0,369	0,297		0,351	1	0,379
E3			0,16	0,21	0,293	0,159	0,276	0,156	0,26	0,227		0,357	0,404	1

Only significant Pearsons correlations are presented. Correlations for cluster 3 are presented above the diagonal; correlations for cluster 4 are presented below the diagonal.

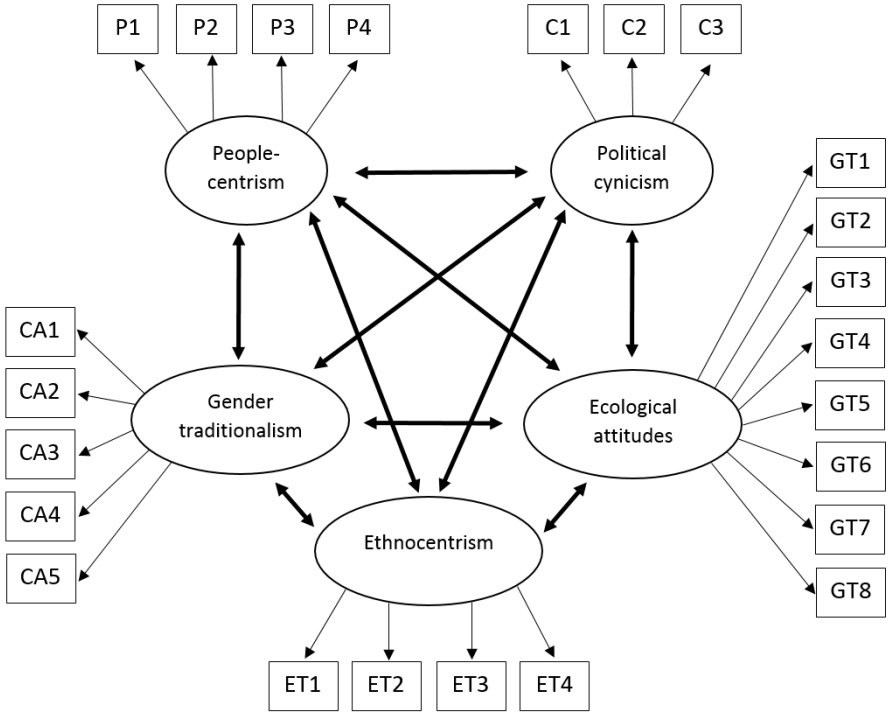


Figure 4. Structural model tested in structural equation modeling for each cluster

Table 4. Measurement model results: standardized loadings and fit indices

		Belief systems			
Construct	Item	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4
People-centrism	P1	0.497***	0.739***	0.489***	0.735***
	P2	0.578***	0.732***	0.303***	0.723***
	P3	0.667***	0.396***	0.488***	0.448***
	P4	0.618***	0.641***	0.418***	0.650***
Political cynicism	C1	0.759***	0.655***	0.604***	0.384***
	C2	0.717***	0.682***	0.742***	0.742***
	C3	0.785***	0.728***	0.813***	0.410***
Ethnocentrism	ET1	0.774***	0.811***	0.833***	0.825***
	ET2	0.912***	0.838***	0.915***	0.819***
	ET3	0.837***	0.793***	0.883***	0.812***
	ET4	0.632***	0.670***	0.609***	0.569***
Ecological attitudes	CA1	0.691***	0.840***	0.709***	0.748***
	CA2	0.583***	0.432***	0.530***	0.642***
	CA3	0.716***	0.807***	0.675***	0.818***
	CA4	0.751***	0.813***	0.726***	0.755***
	CA5	0.473***	0.492***	0.506***	0.560***
Gender traditionalism	GT1	0.655***	0.691***	0.579***	0.618***
	GT2	0.555***	0.649***	0.648***	0.630***
	GT3	0.658***	0.714***	0.739***	0.710***
	GT4	0.739***	0.751***	0.658***	0.690***
	GT5	0.552***	0.558***	0.596***	0.567***
	GT6	0.804***	0.857***	0.761***	0.810***
	GT7	0.503***	0.486***	0.477***	0.307***
	GT8	0.583***	0.536***	0.553***	0.497***
X^2		662.76***	413.157***	496.78***	479.61***
CFI		0.950	0.956	0.936	0.909
TLI		0.943	0.950	0.927	0.897
RMSEA		0.057*	0.053	0.060*	0.067**
N		543	252	298	220

All fit indices are scaled for WLSMV estimations.

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$ (n = 1129)

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